# ‘Beatrice’

## Vertaald door: Eric Colledge

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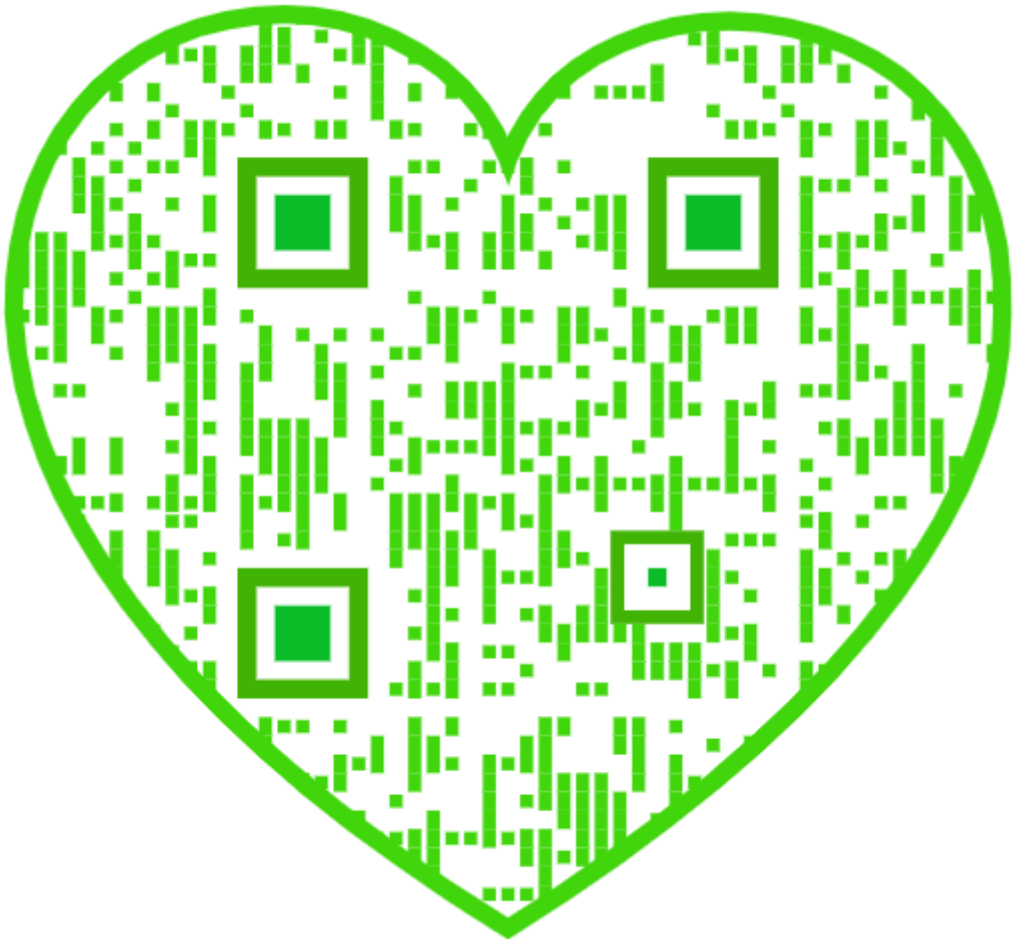

## Introduction

*It could be said that it is pleonastic to call any medieval European literature 'religious', because there is none which does not in some way reflect the all-pervading teachings of the Christian faith. The great Jesuit historian Thurston made this point with admirable succinctness, writing of a strange pseudo-Christ whose antics are recorded in English chronicles of the early thirteenth century, when he designates them as '... some sort of contortionist's or mountebank's trick which took a religious colour chiefly because the ideas and interests of that age centred round religious themes'. Though it may seem to superficial observers that there is no justification, other than that of mere chronology, for including in the same volume the* Letters *of Hadewijch and* Mary of Nijmeghen, *the times in which these two authors wrote did impose upon their work a unifying quality, since both were written in the knowledge that they could appeal to a profound and general assent. to the truths of the Christian faith.*

*The origins of medieval Dutch literature are obscure and for the most part lost, but it is manifest from the earliest verse which has been preserved, such as the* Eneide *of the Limburg poet of courtly romance, Henry van Veldeke, most of which was completed before 1174, that French poetry of chivalry and romance had made an early and deep impression in the Netherlands; and from the earliest surviving prose, notably Beatrice of Nazareth's* Seven Marmers of Loving, *it is clear that such mastery of prose as they display can only be explained by presupposing an intensive education, of women as well as men, in the Latin Scriptures and classics of the spiritual life, and an already flourishing tradition of lucid and flowing composition in the vernacular.*

*Beatrice and Hadewijch are the outstanding figures in the history of the evolution in the Netherlands of the* Frauenbewegung, *that great and victorious revolt of pious women, everywhere in Europe, against the reactionary traditions which would have condemned them in the cloisters as well as in the world to a role of subordination and silence, which would have withheld from them the benefits of literacy*

*and learning, which would have denied to them any active part in the great spiritual revivals and innovations which today we associate chiefly with the names of St Dominic and St Francis, but to which others, notably St Bernard, contributed as much. This 'women's movement' has been faithfully and brilliantly chronicled in recent years for the Rhineland and Germany by Herbert Grundmann; and in his fundamental work on the origins and the spread of the Beguines in the Low Countries, Alcantara Mens has depicted how there, as nowhere else in Europe, the newly-emancipated women religious were able to evolve a way of life hitherto unknown in the West, free from monastic enclosure, observing rules which they themselves devised to meet the needs of individual communities, following lives of intense activity which might be devoted to prayer, to teaching and study, to charitable works, or to all three.*

*Beatrice of Nazareth, in* Seven Manners, *tells us nothing of herself. For such information we have to go to a very few sources, notably Chrysostom Henriquez's* Quinque Prudentes Virgines; *and there we learn that she must have been bom very soon after 1200, and that at the age of eleven she was sent to a house of Beguine s at Zoutleeuw. The chronicle suggests that her family sent her there in the first place for education; hut she was to live the rest of her life (she died in 1268) in such religious communities; and it is plain that she was enabled to cultivate to the full her great literary gifts. Judged solely on its artistic merits,* Seven Manners *is a great achievement, and her mellifluous fluency must surely have served in the next century as one of the models for the great Ruysbroek. She has been strongly influenced, as he too was to be, by St Bernard, the Victories of Paris and by William of St-Thierry; and already she shows preoccupation with those teachings and ideas which we associate with Ruysbroek, with Tauler and with Eckhart: that searching of the soul for God which will lead it towards a union with Him so close 'that the soul no longer can perceive difference between itself and God', a union in which it will experience annihilation, a union from which it will return to find the earth a dessert and human existence a torment.*

*Though it is probable that Beatrice knew nothing of the Low German writings of her near-contemporary Mechtild of Magdeburg, their thought and their language are sometimes startlingly close. 'And like the fish, swimming in the vast sea and resting in its deeps, and like the bird, boldly mounting high in the sky, so the soul feels its spirit freely moving through the vastness and the depth and the unutterable richnesses of love' ... so Beatrice writes, inspired no doubt by St Paul; and in one of her prose poems Mechtild says that just as the fish must seek its natural home, the sea, and the bird find its freedom in the sky, so too must her soul find God.*

*To modern readers, not accustomed or sympathetic to the forms of medieval spirituality, there will no doubt be much in Beatrice which is distasteful if not repellant. Nourished as so many of us have been on the popular conception that religion should express itself in practical works, we may ask: 'What good did she do?' The next Netherlands writer to appear in this anthology, Hadewijch, is obviously conscious that such criticism could be levelled at such Beguines as Beatrice and herself; yet the answers which she provides will hardly be more satisfactory to the modern sceptic. Though she will often betray impatience with the religiosity of religious, as in Letter IV, and though she is convinced of the essentially apostolic and evangelical character of the contemplative vocation, as, of course, her own work witnesses, all of the* Letters *being in the form of instructions to a young Beguine, she is firm that the proper work of the contemplative is prayer and contemplation and nothing else. She and those like her ha ve a duty to the world and especially to fallen sinners, but that duty consists only in intercession. To do more than that is what she calls 'needless involvement', and such work, she is very positive, is not for them: though what she does not say here but seems to imply is that there are others, notably priests, whose proper work the pastoral care of the fallen is, and who can do it better.*

*The soul's true work, for Hadewijch, is* deificatio, *striving for union with God; and she too resembles Mechtild of Magdeburg, in that she tells us more of the sorrows and torments of the soul in this*

*strife than of its joys and consolations. Doubtless she knew the famous passage in Hugh of St Victor, destined to be quoted and borrowed by countless spiritual writers, about 'the play of love', the ceaseless alternation of delight and pain for those who seek for God,*

*She uses the same metaphor when she writes, at the end of Letter I: 'In the beginning my sorrows were great enough, and I longed greatly for what I could not reach; hut now it is as if someone were making sport of me, offering me something, and then, as I stretch, out my hand, knocking it away and saying, "Wouldn't you like it?" and taking back again.' And in this same first letter she is playing on the concept of the love between God and the soul not as rest and peace and fulfilment, but contention and opposition and warfare as she says: 'God has been more angry with me than ever any devil was.' This may shock us, and doubtless it shocked those of her sisters who, she makes clear, opposed her teaching and her way of life, 'our false brethren who pretend that they dwell with us in the one house of the Faith', but we need not be scandalized if we will understand how profoundly her thought has been influenced, and how her language reflects the philosophy and the literary forms of courtly love, of* Minne.

*Mention has already been made of Henry of Veldeke, and recently Theodor Weevers has reminded tis in his admirable account of the beginnings of medieval Dutch poetry that Henry was higly praised by the German poets whom we regard as the masters of the craft of singing the songs of courtly love, Wolfram of Eschenbach and Gottfried of Strasbourg among them, who called him their master and themselves his humble scholars. And in such spiritual writers as Hadewijch we have further testimony that before the fourteenth century, when there appeared that strong reaction in the Netherlands, notably expressed by Jacob of Maerlant, against the poetry of courtly love as blasphemous Venus-worship with which no god-fearing man should have to do, the analogies between the Christian's love of God and the humble, patient, unrewarded, penitential service, which* Minne *demanded of those whom she has enslaved, had been perceived and assimilated so completely that no discord or paradox was seen.*

*To say this is, of course, to heg many questions. No o ne has yet fully explored this field, to show us how much the concepts of courtly love, once they had found their way into the Mediterranean lands from the philosophers and poets of medieval Islam, became enriched and fertilized by Christian ideas and Christian devotion. We must be less prepared today than was, for example, Gilson a generation ago to assert that all the borrowing was by devout Christians from the neo-Ovidians who exploited these newfangled pagan notions as an act of rebellion against the Church's thinking and authority. None the less, in such a case as Hadewijch it is sufficiently evident that the analogy is something of this nature: I am bound to the service of the love of God just as any earthly knight knowingly and willingly enslaves himself to the service of that ideal love which ts embodied in his lady. She will reward him or prolong his servitude and sufferings, as seems good to her, and he must always be her faithful servant, to death, in sorrow as in joy, as so must I with God. It is only the base peasant who thinks that the longings of love merit a prompt satisfaction; and if I demand from God happiness and consolation as the return here on earth for my service in His love, I too should be base, peasant-like, a* villein *knowing nothing of* fine amour. *So Hadewijch says, in Letter VIII, of those lovers of God who are filled with fear: 'They long to suffer for Love, and so they learn all the fine u sages of Love, for fear lest their words should be too churlish to reach the ears of Love.'*

*Yet none of this is for her mere empty fashionable talk. In the first place her whole system of a Christianized* Minne *is based on an accurate knowledge of human psychology, so that she can nonchalantly observe, for example: 'It is a sign of love that the beloved's name is sweet.' And she displays the practicality of her erudition when she at once links this with St Bernard's teaching on devotion to the Holy Name; and always she exhibits a down-to-earth sense in her approach to the idea that God is loved as* Minne *is served in courts and palaces: 'We all want to be God along with God; but God knows that there are few of us who want to be man with Him in His humanity, to carry*

*His Cross with Him, to hang upon it with Him, to pay with Him the debt of human kind.'*

*It is needless here to multiply examples of Hadewijch's justness of touch, of that shrewdness and good feeling which holds her back from the excesses of* Brauttheologie, *from those analogies be tween divine and human love which less balanced readers and followers of St Bernard were so to exploit. Each one of the twenty (about half of the total) of her* Letters *here translated will reveal some different facet of her personality; and perhaps the most difficult and yet the finest of them all will be thought to be her Letter XVII, the careful, patient exposition of her mysterious and intricate poem, 'Seek after every virtue with a gracious zeal.' When, at the end of this letter, she tells us that in a moment of illumination she 'understood God's being.... Still I can find no language for what I have said,' is she telling us that this revelation came to her, not as a vision seen with spiritual eyes, but as a poem heard with spiritual ears, which she has kept in her memory and come little by little to know the true meaning of? To many readers, no doubt, resemblances will suggest themselves between this strange document and, on the one hand, Julian of Norwich's* Revelations, *on the other hand Rilke's* Duino Elegies.

*With Ruysbroek's* Book of the Sparkling Stone *we come to the second generation, as it were, of the Dutch mystical writers. The fervours of the thirteenth century, and the great numbeers of female ecstatics, had produced much piety and devotion, but we cannot doubt that it also helped to encourage the many heretics who lived and taught in the Netherlands, of whom we remember chiefly the Brethren of the Tree Spirit and their mysterious leader, the Brussels prophetess 'Bloemardinne'. (There was at one time a theory, first put out in the fifteenth century by Pomerius, that 'Bloemardinne' was a pseudonym of Hadewijch, but this was rank injustice to one of the very greatest of medieval European spiritual writers, who could only permit herself her extravagances of language and thought because she was fortified in her unimpeachable orthodoxy; and no one today would seriously advance this theory.) We know little of Bloemardinne and her wri-*

*tings, except by implication: Ruysbroek, already a middle-aged man who had served Ste Gudule in Brussels for many years of holy obscurity, first entered public life when he undertook a great and, it would seem, successful preaching campaign against her; and when, soon after, he retired to the 'desert' of Groenendael where in 1351 he took religious vows and founded a house of Augustinian canons and began to write, his earliest works, notably* The Spiritual Espousals, *are deeply concerned with contrasting false mysticism with true. It was an English contemporary of his who called heretics 'the devil's contemplatives', and this is a dominant theme in many of Ruysbroek's treatises. The* Sparkling Stone *is, however, a later work, in which he is leass concerned to combat Manichaean Dualism, less anxious to re but quietism and pantheism, than to teach, positively, how men who are called to that extraordinary way can attain to that union with God which he calls, in the* Espousals, *'living and fruitful.' This is not the place to write of the refinements of his doctrine or of his debt to hi s many great predecessors, from St Paul, St Augustine and 'pseudo-Dionysius' down to Hadewijch, whom he greatly reverenced; the best th at one can do here is to commend the* Sparkling Stone *as one of the very finest pieces of affective writing to appear in the literature of Christian mysticism.*

*It is not without interest that* The Book of the Sparkling Stone *was known in late medieval England, in an English translation of the Latin version made by William Jordaens, under its alternative title,* The Treatise of Perfection of the Sons of God; *and the last works in this anthology have also contributed before now to English knowledge of Netherlands literature.* Mary of Nijmeghen, *translated not in its original dramatic form but as a prose narrative, was printed in Antwerp in the early sixteenth century, for export to England, by John Doesborgh, who had presses both there and in London, and the translator may have been one Laurence Andrews, who did such work for him. And in the* 1920S *Max Reinhardt used Maurice Maeterlinck's version of* Beatrice *as the scenario for his theatrical spectacle,* The Miracle, *which created such a sensation in New York and London.*

Beatrice *is preservel for us in a manuscript, now i n the Royal Library at The Hague, which can be dated c. 1375. The poem itself is probably of the fourteenth century, but it is derived partly from a pious legend narrated by Caesarius of Heisterbach in the early thirteenth century, and there are many other parallels and analogues.*

*We may today find the beginnings of* Beatrice *perfunctory and crude, with singularly little attempt to explore what would, for the twentieth century, be the most interesting aspect of the story, the conflict in the nun's mini before she decided to break her vows. Partly this is because the poet can make his effect by a very perfunctory appeal to the conventions understood and accepted by his audience: Beatrice was enslaved by* Minne, *and once she had been pierced by the dart of Love, there was no help for her; and, he naively adds, 'We must not blame this nun, who was unable to escape from the love which held her captive, because the devil is always longing to tempt man....' But this somewhat scrambled opening is best accounted for as we read on and discover where the poet's real interests lie. As he warms to his central theme, that the vilest sinner must not despair of God's mercy, the whole. temper of the poem changes, the artificiality and the conventions fall away, and the story moves easily and compellingly to its climax. Easily and compellingly, at least, for those who still share the conviction of the poet, and of his age, that man's greatest treasure is his immortal soul, which he imperils by mortal sin.*

*The same conviction informs* Mary of Nijmeghen *and th e modern reader is as little helped as he is in* Beatrice *to understand the predicament in which the heroine finds herself. Why should a well-brought-up, decent, pious girl be so affected by her aunt's abuse that she calls upon the Devil? The aunt's rages and her miserable end we can believe in: she may be a stock figure, a 'humour' rather than a character, but she is drawn with such vigour and zest that she compels us to think that she is real; but Mary simply does not come alive until the moment when the play within the play strikes contrition into her heart. There is true drama and true pathos in the closing scenes, and when in answer to the Pope's horrified questions she says, 'Father, it was the good times,*

*all the money and the presents which he gave me...,' she is a forerunner of Gretchen, and speaks for all the poor foolish fallen girls in the world.*

*More perhaps than any of the other works here,* Mary of Nijmeghen *suffers and loses by translation. Whether or not it is the work of the Antwerp poetess Anna Bijns, it plainly was produced by one of her literary coterie, and the scenes at The Golden Tree, especially Emma-Mary's ballade in praise of rhetoric, have local and contemporary allusions which are lost on us today. The language of the original, too, with its exotic use of dialect and its constant crudity and obscenities, gives it an earthy strength which cannot be reproduced in English. It is only as the play reaches its climax that its appeal widens and becomes universal, so that we feel that we have in it one of the masterpieces of a great age.*

## Beatrice

Van dichten comt mi cleine bate.
Die liede raden mi dat ict late
Ende minen sin niet en vertare
Maer om die doghet van hare
Die moeder ende maghet es bleven,
Hebbic een scone mieracle op heven,
Die god sonder twivel toghede
Marien teren, diene soghede.
Ic wille beghinnen van ere nonnen
Een ghedichte, god moet mi onnen,
Dat ic die poente moet wel geraken
Ende een goet ende daer af maken,
Volcomelijc na der waerheide,
Als mi broeder Ghijsbrecht seide,
Een begheven willemijn;
Hi vant in die boeke sijn.
Hi was een out ghedaghet man.
Die nonne, daer ic af began,
Was hovesche ende subtijl van zeden;
Men vint ghene noch heden,
Die haer ghelijct, ic wane,
Van zeden ende van ghedane.
Dat ic prisede haer lede,
Sonderlinghe haer scoonhede,*
Dats een dinc dat niet en dochte.
Ic wille u segghen, van wat ambochte
Si plach te wesen langhen tijt:
Int clooster daer si droech abijt,
Costersse was si daer,
Dat seggic u al over waer:
Sine was lat no traghe,
No bi nachte no bi daghe.
Si was snel te haren werke;
Si plach te ludene in die kerke;

* The original Dutch text of *Beatrijs* which is printed here, parallel with the English translation, is from *Beatrijs*. *A Middle Dutch Legend*, edited from the only existing manuscript in the Royal Library at The Hague by A.J. Barnouw (London, Oxford University Press, 1914). The editor in his Preface to the text remarks: 'The use of italics seemed... unavoidable in the case of manuscript *oe*, the *e* of which, for the reader's benefit, has been replaced throughout by *o* where ō, not ū is the sound intended'.

Little profit comes to me from writing poetry, and people advise me to give it up and stop addling my brains. But to the honour of her who remains Mother and Virgin I have undertaken to write of a lovely miracle which God beyond doubt performed to the honour of Mary who suckled Him.

Now I will begin my poem, which is about a nun, and may God grant that I may teil the story properly and make a good end to it, agreeing perfectly with the truth, as Brother Gilbert told it to me, who was a pions Williamite friar. He had found it in his books, and he was a very old man.

This nun, of whom I began to tell you, was well-bred and intelligent: I do not think that one would find anyone today to equal her in breeding and manners. But it would not be seemly for me to extol her, and especially not to speak of her beauty; but I can tell you of the office which for a long time she bore. In the monastery in which she was professed, she was the sacristan, and I can truthfully teil you that she was never slow or lazy, night or day, but she was prompt in her work. She used to ring the church bell,

Si ghereide tlicht ende ornament
Ende dede op staen alt covent.

Dese ioffrouwe en was niet sonder
Der minnen, die groot wonder
Pleecht te werken achter lande.
Bi wilen comter af scande,
Quale, toren, wedermoet;
Bi wilen bliscap ende goet.
Den wisen maect si o*o*c so*o* ries
Dat hi moet bliven int verlies,
Eest hem lieft ofte leet.
Si dwingt sulken, dat hine weet
Weder spreken ofte swighen,
Daer hi lo*o*n af waent ghecrighen.
Meneghe worpt si onder voet,
Die op staet, alst haer dunct goet.
Minne maect sulken milde,
Die liever sine ghiften hilde,
Dade hijt niet bider minnen rade.
Noch vintmen liede so*o* ghestade,
Wat si hebben, groot oft clene,
Dat hen die minne gheeft ghemene:
Welde, bliscap ende rouwe;
Selke minne hetic ghetrouwe.
In constu niet gheseggen als,
Hoe vele gheluux ende onghevals
Uter minnen beken ronnen.
Hier omme en darfmen niet veronnen
Der nonnen, dat si niet en conste ontgaen
Der minnen diese hilt ghevaen,
Want die duvel alto*o*s begheert
Den mensche te becorne ende niet en cesseert
Dach ende nacht, spade ende vroe;

she looked after the candles and altar furniture, and she wakened the whole convent.

This virgin did not lead a life without love, love which can perform so many miracles far and wide, love which brings sometimes shame, torment, sorrow, despair, sometimes joy and happiness. Love can make a wise man into such a fool that it brings him to ruin, whether he like it or not. Some love so constrains that they can neither keep silence nor speak, though speech could gain them their reward. When it pleases love, it tramples under foot those who stand upright. Some love makes generous who would withhold all their gifts were it not for the counsels of love. Some are made so steadfast by love that they will share with love whatever they have, much or little, riches, joys or sorrows; and that is what I call true love. I could not tell you of all the good fortune and all the ill which flows out of love's streams. And so we must not blame this nun, who was unable to escape from the love which held her captive; because the devil is always longing to tempt man, and he never stops, day and night, late and early,

Hi doeter sine macht toe.
Met quaden listen, als hi wel conde,
Becordise met vleescheliker sonde,
Die nonne, dat si sterven waende.
Gode bat si ende vermaende,
Dat hise tro*o*ste dore sine ghenaden.
Si sprac: ‘ic ben so*o* verladen
Met starker minnen ende ghewont,
Dat weet hi, dient al es cont,
Die niet en es verholen,
Dat mi die crancheit sal doen dolen;
Ic moet leiden een ander leven;
Dit abijt moetic begheven.’

Nu ho*o*rt, hoeter na verghinc:
Si sende om den ionghelinc,
Daer si toe hadde grote lieve,
O*o*tmoedelijc met enen brieve,
Dat hi saen te hare quame,
Daer laghe ane sine vrame.
Die bode ghinc daer de ionghelinc was.
Hi nam den brief ende las,
Die hem sende sijn vriendinne.
Doe was hi blide in sinen sinne;
Hi haestem te comen daer.
Sint dat si out waren .XIJ. iaer,
Dwanc die minne des e twee,
Dat si dogheden menech wee.

Hi reet, so*o* hi ierst mochte,
Ten clooster, daer hise sochte.
Hi ghinc zitten vo*o*r tfensterkijn
Ende soude gheerne, mocht sijn,
Sijn lief spreken ende sien.

and he does all that is in his power. With his evil cunning, which he well knew how to employ, he tempted the nun with sins of the flesh until she longed for death, and she prayed and entreated God to comfort her with His grace. She said: 'I am so oppressed and wounded by my great love that He who knows all things, from whom nothing is hidden, knows that sickness will soon destroy me. I must lead a different life, and I must renounce this habit.'

Now listen to what happened next. She sent for the youth for whom she felt this great love, humbly asking him in a letter to come to her soon, and it would be to his profit. This message reached the young man, who took and read the letter which his mistress had sent him; and then he rejoiced greatly, and hastened to her, for, since they were twelve years old, love had so ruled these two that they had suffered many woes.

As soon as he could he rode to the cloister and sought her out. He sat down in front of the little window, and he longed, if it might be, to speake to his love and see her.

Niet langhe en merde si na dien;
Si quam ende woudene vanden
Vor tfensterkijn, dat met yseren bandi
Dwers ende lanx was bevlochten.
Menech werven si versochten,
Daer hi sat buten ende si binnen,
Bevaen met also*o* starker minnen.
Si saten so*o* een langhe stonde,
Dat ict ghesegghen niet en conde,
Hoe dicke verwandelde hare blye.
'Ay mi,' seitsi, 'aymie,
Vercoren liefm, i es so*o* wee,
Sprect ieghen mi een wort oft twee,
Dat mi therte conforteert!
Ic ben, die tro*o*st ane u begheert!
Der minnen strael stect mi int herte,
Dat ic doghe grote smerte.
In mach nemmermeer verhoghen,
Lief, ghi en hebbet uut ghetoghen!'

Hi antworde met sinne:
'Ghi wet, wel lieve vriendinne,
Dat wi langhe hebben ghedragen
Minne al onsen daghen.
Wi en hadden nye so*o* vele rusten,
Dat wi ons eens ondercusten.
Vrouwe Vernis, die godinne,
Die dit brachte in onsen sinne,
Moete God onse here verdoemen,
Dat si twee so*o* scone bloemen
Doet vervaluen ende bederven.
Constic wel ane u verwerven,
Ende ghi dabijt wout nederleggen
Ende mi enen sekeren tijt seggen,

She did not long delay after that, but came to discover him at the window, which was latticed with iron bars. They heaved many a deep sigh, as he sat outside and she inside, so imprisoned by their great love. So they sat for a long time, and I could not tell you how often their colour changed. ‘Ah me,’ she said, ‘my beloved, my one true love, I am so full of woe, speak a word or two to me to comfort my heart. I beg you for some consolation. Love's dart has so pierced my heart that I suffer great pain, and unless you can draw it out I shall never be happy again.’

He answered with these words: ‘You know, my own dear love, how long we have suffered the pains of love, and yet we have never had the consolation of exchanging one single kiss. God our Lord must surely condemn that goddess, Lady Venus, for making two such lovely flowers fade and die, when she brought this into our minds. If I could persuade you to abandon your habit and to appoint a time

Hoe ic u ute mochte leiden,
Ic woude riden ende ghereiden
Goede cleder diere van wullen
Ende die met bonten doen vullen:
Mantel, roc ende sercoot.
In begheve u te ghere noot.
Met u willic mi aventueren
Lief, leet, tsuete metten sueren.
Nemt te pande mijn trouwe.'
'Vercorne vrient,' sprac die ioncfrouwe,
'Die willic gherne van u ontfaen
Ende met u soo verre gaen,
Dat niemen en sal weten in dit covent
Werwaert dat wi sijn bewent.
Van tavont over .VIIJ. nachte
Comt ende nemt mijns wachte
Daer buten inden vergier,
Onder enen eglentier.
Wacht daer mijns, ic come uut
Ende wille wesen uwe bruut,
Te varen daer ghi begheert;
En si dat mi siecheit deert
Ocht saken, die mi sijn te swaer,
Ic come sekerlike daer,
Ende ic begheert van u sere,
Dat ghi daer comt, lieve ionchere.'

Dit gheloofde elc anderen.
Hi nam orlof ende ghinc wanderen
Daer sijn rosside ghesadelt stoet.
Hi satter op metter spoet
Ende reet wech sinen telt
Ter stat wert, over een velt.
Sijns lieves hi niet en vergat.

when it would be safe to lead you out of here, then I would ride off and obtain fine woollen clothes and have them lined with fur, cloak and gown and jacket. I would not desert you in any need: I will risk with you whatever may be our lot, joy or sorrow, sweet or sour; and receive my promise as a gage.' 'My dearest love,' the virgin said, 'I am glad to accept your promise, and I shall go away with you so far that no one in this convent shall know what has become of us. Tomorrow week, at night, come here and wait for me outside in the orchard under the eglantine. Wait for me there; I shall escape and I will be your bride, to travel with you wherever you like. Unless sickness prevents me, or circumstances too strong for me, I shall certainly come, and I beg you to be there also, my dear lord.'

So either believed the other's promise, and he took his leave and went off to where his steed stood saddled. He mounted it in speed and galloped off across the land towards the town. He did not forget what he had promised his love,

Sanders daghes ghinc hi in die stat;
Hi cochte blau ende scaerlaken,
Daer hi af dede maken
Mantele ende caproen groot
Ende roc ende sorcoot
Ende na recht ghevoedert wel.
Niemen en sach beter vel
Onder vrouwen cledere draghen.
Si prysdent alle diet saghen.
Messe, gordele ende almoniere
Cochti haer goet ende diere;
Huven, vingherline van goude
Ende chierheit menechfoude.
Om al die chierheit dede hi proeven,
Die eneger bruut soude behoeven.
Met hem nam hi .vc. pont
Ende voer in ere avonstont
Heymelike buten der stede.
Al dat scoonheide voerdi mede
Wel ghetorst op sijn paert
Ende voer alsoo ten cloostere waert,
Daer si seide, inden vergier,
Onder enen eglent
Hi ghinc sitten neder int cruut,
Tote zijn lief soude comen uut.
Van hem latic nu die tale
Ende segghe u vander scoonder smale.
Vore middernacht lude si mettine;
Die minne dede haer grote pine.
Als mettenen waren ghesongen
Beide van ouden ende van iongen
Die daer waren int covent,
Ende si weder waren ghewent
Opten dormter al ghemene,

but he went each day into the town, and he bought blue and scarlet cloth, from which he had a cloak made with a hood, a gown and a jacket, and he had them well lined. No one ever saw finer furs among well-dressed women, and everyone who saw the clothes admired them. He bought for her at great expense a girdle, with scissors and a purse, caps, gold rings and many kinds of ornaments, and he provided all the finery which any bride could need. He took with him five hundred pounds, and one night secretly left the town, carrying all the finery with him, well packed on his horse, and he rode out to the convent, and there where she had said, in the orchard under an eglantine, he sat down on the grass, waiting for his love to come out. Now let me leave him, and continue my story about the lovely young woman. At midnight she rang for matins. Love gave her great sorrow, and when matins had been sung by both the old nuns and the young who were then in the convent, and they had all gone back together to the dormitory,

Bleef si inden co*o*r allene
Ende si sprac haer ghebede,
Alsi te voren dicke dede.
Si knielde vo*o*rden outaer
Ende sprac met groten vaer:
‘Maria, moeder, soete name,
Nu en mach minen lichame
Niet langher in dabijt gheduren.
Ghi kint wel in allen uren
Smenschen herte ende sijn wesen;
Ic hebbe ghevast ende ghelesen
Ende ghenomen discipline,
Hets al om niet dat ic pine;
Minne worpt mi onder voet,
Dat ic der werelt dienen moet.
Also*o* waerlike als ghi, here lieve,
Wort ghehanghen tusschen .ij. dieve
Ende aent cruce wort gherecket,
Ende ghi Lazaruse verwecket,
Daer hi lach inden grave do*o*t,
Soe moetti kinnen minen no*o*t
Ende mine mesdaet mi vergheven;
Ic moet in swaren sonden sneven.’
Na desen ghinc si uten core
Teenen beelde, daer si vore
Knielde ende sprac hare ghebede,
Daer Maria stout ter stede.
Si riep: ‘Maria!’ onversaghet,
‘Ic hebbe u nach ende dach geclaghet
Ontfermelike mijn vernoy
Ende mi en es niet te bat een hoy.
Ic werde mijns sins te male quijt,
Blivic langher in dit abijt!’
Die covel to*o*ch si ute al daer

she remained alone in the choir, saying her prayers as she had often done before. She knelt in front of the altar, and said with great anguish: ‘Mary, mother, sweet name, my body can no longer endure in this habit. You know well at all times what is in man's heart and what his life is. I have fasted and prayed and scourged myself, but I have tormented myself for nothing; love has conquered me, and I must serve the world. As truly as You, my dear Lord, were stretched and hanged upon the cross between two thieves, as truly as You called Lazarus when he lay dead in his grave, so may You know my need and forgive me my trespass, for I must fall into mortal sin.’ And with this she went out of the choir to where the image of Mary stood, and she knelt before it and prayed. Without fear she called out: ‘Mary, I have lamented day and night to you, asking for pity in my distress, and I am not a scrap better off for it. I shall go altogether out of my mind if I stay any longer in this habit.’ Then she took off all her habit

Ende leidse op onser vrouwen outaer.
Doen dede si ute hare scoen.
Nu ho*o*rt, watsi sal doen!
Die slotele vander sacristiën
Hinc si vo*o*r dat heelde Mariën;
Ende ic segt u over waar,
Waer omme dat sise hinc al daer:
Ofmense te priemtide sochte,
Dat mense best daer vinden mochte.
Hets wel recht in alder tijt,
Wie vore Mariën beelde lijt,
Dat hi sijn oghen derwaert sla
Ende segge ‘ave’, eer hi ga,
‘Ave Maria’: daer omme si ghedinct,
Waer omme dat si die slotel daer hinc.

Nu ghinc si danen dorden no*o*t
Met enen pels al blo*o*t,
Daer si een dore wiste,
Die si ontslo*o*t met liste,
Ende ghincker heymelijc uut,
Stillekine sonder gheluut.
Inden vergier quam si met vare.
Di iongelinc wart haers gheware;
Hi seide: ‘lief, en verveert u niet,
Hets u vrient dat ghi hier siet.’
Doen si beide te samen quamen,
Si begonste hare te scamen,
Om dat si in enen pels stoet,
Blo*o*ts ho*o*ft ende barvoet.
Doen seidi: ‘wel scone lichame,
U so*o* waren bat bequame
Scone ghewaden ende goede cleder
Hebter mi om niet te leder,

and laid it upon our Lady's altar, and she took off her shoes. Now listen to what she did next: her sacristan's key she hung in front of Mary's image, and I will tell you why she hung it there. It was so that it would most easily be found when they looked for her at prime, for it is an ancient custom that whoever passes in front of Mary's image should lift tip his eyes to it and say an Ave, Maria before he goes, and that was why she thought of hanging the key there.

Then there was nothing else for her but to go, dressed only in her shift, to where she knew there was a door which she had the trick of opening, and so she stole out without making a sound and came timidly into the orchard. The young man saw her, and said: 'Dear, do not be frightened; it is me, your love, whom you can see.' As they met, she was filled with shame to be standing there in her shift, bareheaded and barefooted; and then he said, 'Your lovely body deserves fine dresses and good clothing; and do not be angry with me on this account,

Ic salse u gheven sciere.’
Doe ghinghen si onder den eglentiere
Ende alles, dies si behoeft,
Des gaf hi hare ghenoech.
Eli gaf haer cleder twee paer,
Blau waest dat si aen dede daer,
Wel ghescepen int ghevoech.
Vriendelike hi op haer loech.
Hi seide: ‘lief, dit hemelblau
Staet u bat dan dede dat grau.’
Twee cousen to*o*ch si ane
Ende twee scoen cordewane
Die hare vele bat stonden
Dna scoen die waren ghebonden.
Ho*o*t cleder van witter ziden
Gaf hi hare te dien tiden,
Die si op haer ho*o*ft hinc.
Doen cussese die ionghelinc
Vriendelike aen haren mont.
Hem dochte, daer si vo*o*r hem stont,
Dat die dach verclaerde.
Haestelike ghinc hi tsinen paerde,
Hi settese vo*o*r hem int ghereide.
Dus voren si henen beide,
Soe verre, dat began te daghen,
Dat si hen nyemen volghen en saghen.
Doen begant te lichtene int o*o*st.
Si seide: ‘God, alder werelt tro*o*s,
Nu moeti ons bewaren,
Ic sie den dach verclaren.
Waric met u nietcomen uut,
Ic soude prime hebben gheluut,
Als ic wilen was ghewone
Inden clo*o*ster van religione.

for I shall give you beautiful thing.' So they went under the eglantine, and everything which she needed, he gave her in great plenty. He gave her two gowns, and it was the blue one which she put on then, well and fittingly made. He looked lovingly at her and said, 'Dear, sky-blue suits you better than grey.' She put on a pair of stockings, and a pair of fine shoes, which suited her better than her sandals. Then he gave her veils of white silk, with which she covered her head. Then the young man lovingly kissed her lips, and it seemed to him as she stood there before him that the day was breaking. Quickly he went to his horse, and set her in front of him in the saddle, and so they both rode so far that as it began to dawn they saw that no one was following them. When the east began to grow light, she said: 'God, comfort of the whole world, guard us now. I see the day dawning, and had I not run away with you, I should have rung the bell for prime as I used to in our convent.

I think that I shall repent this journey, for there is little faith in the world, to which I have now confided myself: it is like those dishonest traders who sell rings made of base metal for gold.'

Ic ducht mi die vaert sal rouwen:
Die werelt hout so*o* cleine trouwe,
Al hebbic mi ghekeert daeran;
Si slacht den losen coman,
Die vingherline van formine
Vercoopt voor guldine.'

'Ay, wat segdi, suverlike,
Ocht ic u emmermeer beswike,
So*o* moete mi God seinden!
Waer dat wi ons bewinden,
In scede van u te ghere no*o*t,
Ons en scede die bitter do*o*t!
Hoe mach u aen mi twien?
Ghi en hebt aen mi niet versien,
Dat ic u fel was ofte lo*o*s.
Sint dat ic u ierst verco*o*s,
En haddic niet in minen sinne
Ghedaen een keyserinne.
Op dat ic haers werdech ware,
Lief, en liete u niet om hare!
Des moghedi seker wesen.
Ik vore met ons ute ghelesen
.Vc. pont wit selverijn,
Daer seldi, lief, vrouwe af sijn.
Al varen wie in vremde lande,
Wine derven verteren ghene pande
Binnen desen seven iaren.'
Dus quamen si den telt ghevaren
Smorgens aen een foreest,
Daer die voghele hadden feest.
Si maecten so*o* gro*o*t ghescal,
Datment ho*o*rde over al.
Elc sanc na der naturen sine.

‘Ah, what are you saying, my lovely one? If ever I were to betray you, so may God destroy me! Wherever we may go, I shall not leave you under any circumstances, unless cruel death part us. How can you doubt me? You have never found me cruel or false to you, and since I first chose you, I would not have set my mind upon an empress, had I been worthy of her, nor would I have left you for her, my dear one. Of this you may be sure. I have taken care to bring with us five hundred pounds in pure silver, and of this you shall be the mistress, dear one. Even though we travel abroad, we shall not need to sell anything for the next seven years.’

So, as they galloped on, they came during the morning to a forest in which the birds were rejoicing. They made such a tumult that one could hear it everywhere, as each one sang according to its kind.

Daer stonden scone bloemkine
Op dat groene velt ontploken,
Die scone waren ende suete roken.
Die locht was claer ende scone.
Daer stonden vele rechte bome,
Die ghelovert waren rike.
Die ionghelinc sach op die suverlike,
Daer hi ghestade minne toe droech.
Hi seide: ‘lief, waert u ghevoech,
Wi souden beeten ende bloemen lesen,
Het dunct mi hier scone wesen.
Laet ons spelen der minnen spel.’
‘Wat segdi’, sprac si, ‘dorper fel,
Soudic beeten op tfelt,
Ghelijc enen wive die wint ghelt
Dorperlijc met haren lichame,
Seker, so*o* haddic cleine scame!
Dit en ware u niet ghesciet,
Waerdi van dorpers aerde niet!
Ic mach mi bedinken onsochte.
Godsat hebdi diet sochte!
Swighet meer deser talen
Ende ho*o*rt die voghele inden dalen,
Hoe si singhen ende hem vervroyen.
Die tijt sal u te min vernoyen,
Alsic bi u ben al naect
Op een bedde wel ghemaect,
So*o* doet al dat u ghenoecht
Ende dat uwer herten voeght.
Ic hebs in mijn herte toren,
Dat ghijt mi heden leit te voren.’

Hi seide: ‘lief en belghet u niet.
Het dede Venus, diet mi riet.

Lovely flowers stood everywhere, blossoming upon the green field, beautiful to see and sweet to smell. The air was clear and bright, and many tall trees, richly leaved, stood there. The young man looked upon the beautiful young woman for whom he felt a constant love, and he said: ‘Beloved, if it would please you to dismount and gather some flowers, this seems to me to be a good place; and here let us play the game of love.’ She said,‘Why are you talking like a crude village lout? Do you expect me to dismount here, in the fields, like a peasant woman who earns money with her body? Indeed, I should have little modesty to do that. Such a thing would never have occurred to you if you were not yourself a peasant by nature. I may well repent what I have done. God's curse on you who wished for such a thing. Speak no more of such matters, and listen to how the birds in this valley sing and rejoice, and so the time will pass pleasantly for you. When I lie naked beside you in a well-made bed, then do everything that you please and which your heart longs for. But it is a grief in my heart that you have suggested this to me.’

He said: ‘Beloved, do not be angry. It was Venus who prompted me to this.’

God geve mi scande ende plaghe,
Ochtic[s] u emmermeer ghewaghe.'
Si seide: 'ic vergheeft u dan,
Ghi sijt mijn troost voor alle man
Die leven onder den trone.
Al levede Absolon die scone
Ende ic des wel seker ware
Met hem te levene .M. iare
In weelden ende in rusten,
Ic liets mi niet ghecusten.
Lief, ic hebbe u soo vercoren,
Men mocht mi dat niet legghen voren,
Dat ic uwes soude vergheten.
Waric in hemelrike gheseten
Ende ghi hier in ertrike,
Ic quame tot u sekerlike!
Ay God, latet onghewroken
Dat ic dullijc hebbe ghesproken!
Die minste bliscap in hemelrike
En es hier ghere vrouden ghelike;
Daer es die minste soo volmaect,
Datter zielen niet en smaect
Dan Gode te minnen sonder inde.
Al erdsche dinc es ellinde,
Si en dooghet niet een haer
Jeghen die minste die es daer.
Diere om pinen die sijn vroet,
Al eest dat ic dolen moet
Ende mi te groten sonden keren
Dore u, lieve scone ionchere.'

Dus hadden si tale ende wedertale.
Si reden berch ende dale.
In can u niet ghesegghen wel

May God send me dreadful punishment if ever I dare to do such a thing again.' She said: 'Then I forgive you, for you are my comfort, above every man living under heaven. Even if the beautiful Absolom were alive, and I were sure of living with him for a thousand years, that would not compensate me for you. My dear one, I have loved you so dearly that no one could persuade me that I might ever forget you. Even if I were established in heaven, if you were here upon earth I should come to you without fail. Oh God, do not punish me for the folly I have spoken: there is no joy here to compare with the least of heaven's joys. The least joy there is so perfect that the soul asks for nothing than to love God everlastingly. Every earthly joy is exile, and not worth a straw compared with heaven's least joy, and those who long for such joys are wise. Yet I am forced to go astray and to choose a life of great sin for love of you, dear and lovely lord.'

So they rode over mountains and through valleys, conversing with one another, and I cannot well tell you

Wat tusschen hen tween ghevel.
Si voren alsoo voort,
Tes si quanten in een poort,
Die scone stont in enen dale.
Daer soo bequaemt hem wale,
Dat siere bleven der iaren seven
Ende waren in verweenden leven
Met ghenuechten van lichamen,
Ende wonnen .ij. kinder tsamen.
Daer, na den seven iaren,
Alse die penninghen verteert waren,
Moesten si teren vanden pande,
Die si brachten uten lande.
Cleder, scoonheit ende paerde
Vercochten si te halver warde
Ende brochtent al over saen.
Doen en wisten si wat bestaen;
Si en conste ghenen roc spinenn,
Daer si met mochte winnen.
Die tijt wart inden lande diere
Van spisen, van wine ende ban viere
Ende van al datmen eten mochte.
Dies hem wart te moede onsochte;
Si waren hem liever vele doot,
Dan si hadden ghebeden broot.
Die aermoede maecte een ghesceet
Tusschen hem beiden, al waest hem leet.
Aenden man ghebrac dierste trouwe;
Hi lietse daer in groten rouwe
Ende voer te sinen lande weder.
Si en sachen met oghen nye zeder.
Daer bleven met hare ghinder
Twee uter maten scone kinder.

all that was said between them. They travelled on until they came to a town, finely situated in a valley, which pleased them so well that they lived there for seven years, living a life of pleasure and bodily delights, and they had two children. But after seven years, when all their money was spent, they had to live by pledging what they had brought with them. Clothing, jewels and horses they sold for half their value, and soon they had used up that money. They did not know what to do. She could not spin and earn money that way. At that time prices were high in the region: food, wine, beer, everything needed for sustenance was dear. This was a great distress to them, for they would rather have died than have begged for bread. Poverty made division between them, much though it hurt them. It was the man who first broke faith. He left her there in great misery and returned to his own country. She never saw him again; and she remained behind there with her two children, who were very beautiful.

Si sprac: ‘hets mi comen toe,
Dat ic duchte spade ende vroe;
Ic ben in vele doghens bleven.
Die ghene heeft mi begheven,
Daer ic mi trouwen to verliet.
Maria, vrouwe, oft ghi ghebiet,
Bidt vore mi ende mine .ij. ionghere.
Dat wi niet en sterven van hongere.
Wat salic doen, elendech wijf!
Ic moet beide, ziele ende lijf,
Bevlecken met sondeghen daden.
Maria, vrouwe, staet mi in staden!
Al constic enen roc spinnen,
In mochter niet met winnen
In tween weken een broot.
Ic moet gaen dorden noot
Buten der stat op tfelt
Ende winnen met minen lichame ghelt,
Daer ic met mach copen spise.
In mach in ghere wise
Mijn kinder niet begheven.‘
Dus ghinc si in een sondech leven.
Want men seit ons overwaer,
Dat si langhe seve iaer
Ghemene wijf ter werelt ghinc
Ende meneghe sonde ontfinc,
Dat haer was wel onbequame,
Die si dede metten lichame,
Daer si cleine ghenuechte hadde in;
Al dede sijt om een cranc ghewin,
Daersi haer kinder met onthelt.
Wat holpt al vertelt
Die scamelike sonden ende die zwaer,
Daer si in was .XIIIJ. iaer!

Then she said: ‘Now what I feared, late and early, has come upon me. Here I am in great suffering, and he whom I put my trust in has deserted me. Mary, Lady, if it be your will, pray for me and my two children, that we do not die of hunger. What should I do, miserable woman? I have made my immortal soul and my days on earth foul with my sinful deeds. Mary, Lady, be my help! Even if I did know how to spin, I could not earn enough in two weeks to buy one loaf. Necessity forces me to go out of the town to the fields, and sell my body for money so that I can buy food. Under no circumstances can I abandon my children.’ So she embarked upon a sinful life, and they tell us that for the next seven years she lived as a common whore, and committed many sins. What she did with her body was a misery to her in which she took no pleasure. She only did it so as to scrape a bare living and to keep her children. What would be the profit of enumerating the great and horrible sins in which she lived for fourteen years?

Maer emmer en lietsi achter niet,
Hadsi rouwe oft verdriet,
Sine las alle daghe met trouwen
Die seven ghetiden van onser vrouwen.
Die las si haer te loven ende teren,
Dat sise moeste hekeren
Uten sondeliken daden,
Daer si was met beladen
Bi ghetale .XIIIJ. iar;
Dat segghic u over waer.
Si was seven iaer metten man,
Die .ij. kindere an hare wan,
Diese liet in ellinde,
Daer si doghede groot meswinde.
Dierste .VIJ. iaer hebdi gehoort;
Verstaet hoe si levede voort.

Als die ·XIIIJ. iaer waren gedaen,
Sinde haer God int herte saen
Berouwennesse alsoo groot,
Dat si met euen swerde al bloot
Liever liete haer hoot af slaən,
Dan si meer sonden hadde ghecaen
Met haren lichame, alsi plach
Si weende nacht eede dach,
Dat haer oghen selden drogheded.
Si seids: ‘Maria, die Gode soghede,
Fonteyne boven alle wiven,
Laet mi inder noot niet bliven!
Vrouwe, ic neme u torconden,
Dat mi rouwen mine sonden
Ende sijn mi herde leet.
Der es soo vele, dat ic en weet
Waer icse dede ocht met wien.

But always, however great her miseries might be, she never forgot to read each day with devotion the seven hours of our Lady, which she read to Mary's praise and honour, asking her to turn her away from the sinful deeds with which she had been oppressed for a full fourteen years. What I have told you is true: she lived seven years with the man who begot two children by her, and who left her in destitution through which she suffered great distress. You have been told of the first seven years, and you know how she lived after that.

When the fourteen years were over, God suddenly sent into her heart such great contrition that she would rather have suffered her head to bec ut off with a naked sword than go on committing carnal sins as she had done. She wept night and day, so that her eyes were seldom dry. She said: ‘Mary, who suckled God, you pure spring, beyond all women, let me not remain in need! Lady, I call you to witness my contrition for my sins and the sorrows of my heart. My sins are so many that I do not know where I committed them or with whom.

Ay lacen! wat sal mijns ghescien!
Ic mach wel ieghen dordeel sorgen -
Doghen Gods zijn mi verborgen -,
Daer sonden selen bliken,
Beide van armen ende van riken,
Ende alle mesdaet sal sijn ghewroken,
Daer en si vore biechte af ghesproken
Ende penitencie ghedaen.
Dat wetic wel, sonder waen.
Des benic in groten vare.
Al droghic alle daghe een hare,
Ende cro*o*per met van lande te lande
Over voete ende over hande
Wullen, barvoet, sonder scoen,
Nochtan en constic niet ghedoen,
Dat ic van sonden worde vri,
Maria, vrouwe, ghi en tro*o*st mi,
Fonteyne boven alle doghet!
Ghi hebt den meneghen verhoghet,
Alse wel Teophuluse sceen;
Hi was der quaetster sonderen een
Ende haddem den duvel op ghegeven,
Beide ziele ende leven,
Ende was worden sijn man;
Vrouwe, ghi verlo*o*sseten nochtan.
Al benic een besondech wijf
Ende een onghetro*o*st keytijf,
In wat leven ic noy[t] was,
Vrouwe, ghedinct dat ic las
Tuwer eren een ghebede!
To*o*nt aen mi u o*o*tmoedechede!
Ic ben ene die es bedroevet
Ende uwer hulpen wel behoevet;
Dies maghic mi verhouden:

Alas, what is to become of me! I may well dread that Day of Judgment, for God's mercy is hidden from me, and all sins will then be shown, both of the poor and of the rich, and every misdeed will be avenged unless it has before been revealed at confession, and penance performed. I know very well that this is true, and I am in great fear on account of it. Though I were to wear a hair shirt every day, though I were to go crawling from country to country on my hands and knees, clad in coarse clothes and barefooted, still I could not do enough to free myself from my sins. Mary, Lady, be my consolation, you pure spring, beyond all virtue! You have brought gladness to many, as appeared indeed through Theophilus, who was one of the worst of sinners, and had surrendered himself soul and body to the devil and had become his servant; yet, Lady, you did not abandon him. Though I am a sinful woman and an abandoned wretch, whatever kind of life I lived, still remember, Lady, that I used to say a prayer in honour of you. Look on me in clemency. I am an afflicted one, in great need of your help. I may make bold to ask this:

En bleef hem nye onvergouden,
Die u gruete, maget vrië,
Alle daghe met ere ave marië.
Die u ghebet gherne lesen,
Sie mo*o*ghen wel seker wesen,
Dat hem daer af sal comen vrame.
Vrouwe, hets u so*o* wel bequame,
Uut vercorne Gods bruut.
U sone sinde u een saluut
Te Nazaret, daer hi u sochte,
Die u ene bo*o*tscap brochte,
Die nye van bode was ghehoort;
Daer omme sijn u die selve woort
So*o* bequame sonder wanc,
Dat gilijs wet elken danc,
Die u gheerne daer mede quet.
Al waer hi in sonden belet,
Ghi souten te ghenaden bringhen
Ende voor uwen sone verdinghen.'
Dese bedinghe ende dese claghe
Dreef die sondersse alle daghe.
Si nam een kint in elke hant,
Ende ghincker met door tlant,
In armoede, van stede te steden,
Ende levede bider beden.
So*o* langhe dolede si achter dlant,
Dat si den cloo*s*ter weder vant,
Daer si hadde gheweest nonne,
Ende quam daer savons na der soune
In ere weduwen huus spade,
Daer si bat herberghe door ghenade,
Dat si daer snachts mochte bliven.
'Ic mocht u qualijc verdriven,'
Sprac die weduwe, 'met uwen kinderkinen.

do not leave them unrewarded, the greetings I gave to you every day with an Ave, Maria. Those who say your prayer with devotion may be very sure that help will come to them from this. Lady, chosen bride of God, this is very pleasing to you. Your Son sent you a greeting to Nazareth, where He sought you, and brought you such a message as was never before heard of any messenger. Therefore the very words of that message are beyond doubt so pleasing to you that you are full of every gratitude to those who greet you with them. However bogged down in sin, you would bring them into grace and intercede for them before your Son.' Daily this sinful woman offered up these petitions and lamentations.

She took a child in either hand, and with them she wandered through the country, in poverty, going from place to place and living by begging; and she wandered around the country until she came back to the monastery where she had been a nun; and late one evening, after sunset, she came to the house of a widow whom she asked for shelter out of kindness, if she might stay there the night. 'I could hardly send you away with your little children,' the widow said.

Mi dunct dat si moede scinen.
Ruust u ende sit neder.
Ic sal u deilen weder
Dat mi verleent onse here
Do*o*r siere liever moeder ere.'
Dus bleef si met haren kinden
Ende soude gheerne ondervinden,
Hoet inden clo*o*ster stoede.
'Segt mi,' seitsi, 'vrouwe goede,
Es dit covint van ioffrouwen?'
'Jaet,' seitsi, 'bi miere trouwen.
Dat verweent es ende rike;
Men weet niewer sijns ghelike.
Die nonnen diere abijt in draghen,
In ho*o*rde nye ghewaghen
Van hen gheen gherochten
Dies si blame hebben mochten.'

Die daer bi haren kinderen sat,
Si seide: 'waer bi segdi dat?
Ic ho*o*rde binnen deser weken
So*o* vele van ere nonnen spreken;
Alsic verstoet in minen sinne,
So*o* was si hier costerinne.
Diet mi seide hine lo*o*ch niet:
Hets binnen .XIIIJ. iaren ghesciet,
Dat si uten clo*o*ster streec.
Men wiste noyt, waer si weec
Oft in wat lande si inde nam.'
Doen wert die weduwe gram
Ende seide: 'ghi dunct mi reven!
Derre talen seldi begheven
Te segghene vander costerinnen
Oft ghi en blijft hier niet binnen!

‘You seem to me to be tired. Sit down and rest. I will give you a share of what I have, and our Lord will repay me to the honour of His dear mother.’ So she stayed there with her children, and she dearly wanted to find out how things were in the monastery. ‘Teil me,’ she said, ‘good woman, is this a convent of virgins?’ ‘Yes,’ she replied, ‘it is indeed, and a rich and splendid one. No one ever saw its like; and no one ever heard anyone dare to speak ill of the nuns who live there, so as to bring them into disrepute.’

The woman sitting there with her children said: ‘How can you say that? Only this week I heard such things said about a nun that I was astounded, and she was sacristan here. The person who told me was not lying. It is now fourteen years ago since she ran away from the monastery, and nobody knew where she fled to or in what country she ended.’ Then the widow became angry, and said: ‘I think you must be mad! Either you stop telling such stories about the sacristan, or you do not remain in this house!

Si heeft hier costersse ghesijn
.XIIIJ. iaer den termijn,
Dat men haers noyt ghemessen conde
In alden tiden éne metten stonde,
Hen si dat si waer onghesont.
Hi ware erger dan een hont,
Diere af seide el dan goet;
Si draghet so*o* reynen moet,
Die eneghe nonne draghen mochte.
Die alle die clo*o*sters dore sochte,
Die staen tusschen Elve ende der Geronde
Ic wane men niet vinden en conde
Neghene die gheesteliker leeft!'

Die also*o* langhe hadde ghesneeft
Dese tale dochte haer wesen wonder,
Ende seide: 'vrouwe, maect mi conder.
Hoe hiet haer moeder ende vader?'
Doe noemesise beide gader.
Doen wiste si wel, dat si haer meende.
Ay God! hoe si snachs weende
Heymelike vo*o*r haer bedde!
Si seide: 'ic en habbe ander wedde
Dan van herten gro*o*t berouwe.
Sijt in mijn hulpe, Maria, vrouwe!
Mijn sonden sijn mi so*o* leet,
Saghic enen hoven heet,
Die in groten gloyen stonde,
Dat die vlamme ghinghe uten monde,
Ic croper in met vlite,
Mochtic mier sonden werden quite.
Here, ghi hebt wanhope verwaten,
Daer op willic mi verlaten!
Ic ben, die altoos ghenade ho*o*pt,

She has been sacristan now these fourteen years, and in all that time sickness has never made her absent from her duties for as long as one mass. Anyone who said anything other than good of her would be madder than a dog. Her disposition is as pure as that of any nun. If you were to search in all the nunneries between the Elbe and the Gironde, I do not believe that you could find anyone living a more spiritual life!'

This story amazed the woman, who had for so long lived in sin, and she said: 'Good woman, assure me about this. What were the names of her father and mother?' Then the other named them both, and she knew well that it was she herself who was meant. Oh God, how she wept that night in secret beside her bed! She said: 'My only possession is great contrition of heart. Mary, Lady, come to my help! My sins are so hateful to me that if I were to see a fiery furnace standing glowing with Barnes belching out, I would gladly crawl inside it if I could so be free of my sins. Lord, You have forbidden us to despair, and in that will I put my trust. Always I hope for Your grace,

Al eest dat mi anxt no*o*pt
Ende mi bringt in groten vare.
En was nye so*o* groten sondare,
Sint dat ghi op ertrike quaemt
Ende menschelike vorme naemt
Ende ghi aen den cruce wout sterven.
Sone lieti den sondare niet bederven;
Die met berouwenesse socht gnade,
Hi vantse, al quam hi spade,
Alst wel openbaer scheen
Den enen sondare vanden tween,
Die tuwer rechter siden hinc.
Dats ons een tro*o*stelijc dinc,
Dat ghine ontfinc[t] onbescouden.
Goet berou mach als ghewouden;
Dat maghic merken an desen.
Ghi seit: ‘vrient, du salt wesen
Met mi heden in mijn rike,
Dat segghic u ghewaerlike.’
Noch, here, waest openbare,
Dat Gisemast, die mordenare,
Ten lesten om ghenade bat.
Hi gaf u weder gout no scat,
Dan hem berouden sine sonden.
U ontfermecheit en es niet te gronden
Niet meer, dan men mach
Die zee uut sceppen op enen dach
Ende droghen al toten gronde.
Dus was nye so*o* grote sonde,
Vrouwe, u ghenaden en gaen boven.
Hoe soudic dan sijn verscoven
Van uwer ontfermecheit,
Ocht mi mijn sonden sijn so*o* leit!’

even though I am dogged by fear and brought into great terror. There was never any sinner so great that You would abandon him to perdition, since You came upon earth and took human form and were willing to die upon the Cross. If such a sinner with repentance sought grace, he found it, however late he might seek for it, as it plainly was shown by that one of the two malefactors who hung at Your right hand. It is for us great consolation that You received him and forgave him. Perfect contrition is of great power, as I can see from this. You said: 'Friend, truly I say to you that you will be with Me today in My kingdom.' And it was plain, Lord, that Dismas, this murderer, asked for Your grace in the end. He offered You neither gold nor silver, only his repentance for his sins. We can no more measure Your mercy than we can in a single day shift and dry up the deep sea. Nor was there ever, Lady, sin so great that it exceeded your pity. How then should I be thrust out from your clemency, if my sins are so hateful to me?'

Daer si lach in dit ghebede,
Quam een vaec in al haer lede
Ende si wart in lape sochte.
In enen vysioen haer dochte,
Hoe een stemme aan haer riep,
Daer si lach ende sliep:
‘Mensche, du heves so*o* langhe gecarmt,
Dat Maria dijns ontfarmt,
Want si heeft u verbeden.
Gaet inden clo*o*ster met haestecheden:
Ghi vint die doren open wide,
Daer ghi uut ginges ten selven tide
Met uwen lieve, den ionghelinc,
Die u inder no*o*t af ghinc.
Al dijn abijt vinstu weder
Ligghen opten outaer neder;
Wile, covele ende scoen
Mo*o*ghedi coenlijc ane doen;
Des danct ho*o*ghelike Mariën:
Die slotele vander sacristiën,
Die ghi vo*o*r tbeelde hinct
Snachs, doen ghi uut ghinct,
Die heeft si so*o* doen bewaren,
Darmen binnen .XIIIJ. iaren
Uwes nye en ghemiste,
So*o* dat yemen daer af wiste.
Maria es so*o* wel u vrient:
Si heeft alto*o*s voor u ghedient
Min no meer na dijn ghelike.
Dat heeft de vrouwe van hemelrike,
Sonderse, do*o*r u ghedaen!
Si heet u inden clo*o*ster gaen.
Ghi en vint nyeman op u bedde.
Hets van Gode, dat ic u quedde!’

So she lay prostrate at her prayers, until slumber overcame her whole body and she slept peacefully; and then it seemed to her as if in a vision a voice called to her as she lay asleep: ‘Woman, you have entreated for so long that Mary has had pity on you and interceded for you. Go at once to the monastery, and you will find the doors wide open at the same hour as you ran away with the young man your paramour, when you went off to a life of misery. You will find all your habit still laid out on the altar, your veil and cowl and shoes; have no fear but put them on, and say fervent thanks to Mary for this. And she has so taken care of the sacristan's key which you hung before her image on that night when you ran away that no one has missed you in fourteen years or knew what happened to you. Mary is such a friend to you that all this time she has done your office for you, just as you did it, neither less nor more. This is what the mistress of Heaven has done for you, a sinner! Now she orders you to go back to the monastery, where you will find no one sleeping in your bed. What I have told you is a message from God.’

Na desen en waest niet lanc,
Dat si uut haren slape ontspranc.
Si seide: ‘God, gheweldechere,
En ghehinct den duvel nemmermere,
Dat hi mi bringhe in mere verdriet,
Dan mi nu es ghesciet!
Ochtic nu inden clo*o*ster ghinghe
Ende men mi over dieveghe vinghe,
So*o* waric noch meer ghescent,
Dan doen ic ierst rumde covent.
Ic mane u, God die goede,
Dor uwen pretiosen bloede,
Dat uut uwer ziden liep,
Ocht die stemme, die aen mi riep,
Hier es comen te minen baten,
Dat sijs niet en moete laten,
Si en come anderwerf tot hare
Ende derde werven openbare,
So*o* dat ic mach sonder waen
Weder in minen clo*o*ster gaen.
Ic wilre om benediën
Ende loven alto*o*s Mariën!’

Sanders snachts, moghedi horen,
Quam haer een stemme te voren,
Die op haer riep ende seide:
‘Mensche, du maecs te langhe beide!
Ganc weder in dinen clo*o*ster,
God sal wesen dijn tro*o*ster.
Doet dat Maria u ontbiet!
Ic ben haer bode, en twivels niet.’
Nu heefsise anderwerf vernomen
Die stemme tote haer comen
Ende hietse inden clo*o*ster gaen;

Soon after this she started up out of her sleep, and said: ‘God, almighty ruler, do not permit the devil to bring me into greater misery than I am in now. If I were to go back to the monastery now and they were to apprehend me as a thief, I should be in a worse state than when first I fled from the convent. I entreat you, my good God, by the Precious Blood which flowed from Your side, if the voice which called to me has come to me to help me, that You do not suffer it to be silent, but let it speak a second and a third time, clearly, so that I may go back to my monastery without fear; and in return I shall always bless and praise Mary.’

On the next night, you may hear, a voice sounded to her, calling for her and saying: ‘Woman, you are delaying too long! Go back to your monastery, and God will comfort you. Do as Mary commands you. I am her messenger; you need not doubt.’ So she understood once again the voice which spoke to her and commanded her to go into the monastery;

Nochtan en dorst sijs niet bestaen.
Der derder nacht verbeyt si noch
Ende seide: ‘eest elfs ghedroch,
Dat mi comt te voren,
So*o* maghic cortelike scoren
Des duvels ghewelt ende sine cracht
Ende ocht hire comt te nacht,
Here, so*o* maecten so*o* confuus,
Dat hi vare uten huus,
Dat hi mi niet en moete scaden.
Maria, nu staet mi in staden,
Die ene stemme ane mi sint,
Ende hiet mi gaen int covint;
Ic mane u, vrouwe, bi uwen kinde,
Dat ghise mi derdewerven wilt sinden.’

Doen waecte si den derden nacht.
Een stemme quam van gods cracht
Met enen over groten lichte
Ende seide: ‘hets bi onrechte,
Dat ghi niet en doet dat ic u hiet,
Want u Maria bi mi ontbiet.
Ghi mo*o*cht beiden te lanc.
Gaet inden clo*o*ster, sonder wanc,
Ghi vint die doren op ende wide ontdaen,
Daer ghi wilt, moghedi gaen.
U abijt vindi weder
Ligghende op ten outaer neder.’
Als die stemme dit hadde gheseit,
Mochte die zondersse die daer leit,
Die claerheit metten oghen wel sien;
Si seide: ‘nu en darf mi niet twien,
Dese stemme comt van Gode,
Ende es der maghet Mariën bode.

but still she did not dare to do it. She waited for the third night, and said: ‘If it is the deceit of some evil spirit which manifests itself to me, then let me soon overcome the devil's power and cunning, and if he should appear again tonight, Lord, vanquish him so that he flee from the house, so that he cannot harm me. Mary, come to my help now: you who sent a voice to me, bidding me go to the monastery, I entreat you, Lady, by your Child that you send the voice to me a third time.’

Then on the third night she kept watch, and through the power of God a voice came, with a dazzling light, and said: ‘For shame that you have not done as I commanded you, as Mary bade you through me. You may delay too long. Go back to the monastery without fear, and you will find the doors opened wide, so that you can go wherever you choose. You will find your habit still laid out on the altar.’ When the voice had said this, the sinful woman, lying there, could clearly see the light; and she said: ‘I no longer dare doubt that this voice comes from God and is the messenger of the Virgin Mary.

Dat wetic nu sonder hone.
Si comt met lichte so*o* scone:
Nu en willies niet laten,
Ic wille mi inden clo*o*ster maken,
Ic saelt o*o*c doen in goeder trouwen
Opten tro*o*st van onser vrouwen,
Ende wille mijn kinder beide gader
Bevelen Gode onsen Vader.
Hi salse wel bewaren.'
Doen to*o*ch si ute al sonder sparen
Haer cleder, daer sise met decte
Heymelike, dat sise niet en wecte.
Si cussese beide aen haren mont.
Si seide: 'kinder, blijft ghesont.
Op den tro*o*st van onser vrouwen
Latic u hier in goeder trouwen,
En hadde mi Maria niet verbeden,
Ic en hadde u niet begheven
Om al tgoet, dat Rome heeft binnen.'
Ho*o*rt, wes si sal beghinnen.

Nu gaet si met groten weene
Ten clo*o*ster waert, moeder eene.
Doen si quam inden vergiere,
Vant si die dore ontsloten sciere.
Si ghincker in sonder wanc:
'Maria, hebbes danc,
Ic ben comen binnen mure;
God gheve mi goede aventure!'
Waer si quam, vant si die dore
Al wide open ieghen hore.
In die kerke si doe trac;
Heymelike si doe sprac:
'God here, ic bidde u met vlite,

Now I know that without any fear of deceit, because it comes accompanied by this lovely light. Now I shall no longer delay, but make my way to the monastery; and I shall do this in good faith, trusting to our Lady, and I shall commend my two children to God our Father, and He will take good care of them.' Then she took off all her clothing, and quietly covered her children with it, so that they did not wake. She kissed them both on the lips, and she said: 'Children, farewell. I leave you here in good faith, trusting in our Lady. Had Mary not ordered me to do this, I would not have forsaken you for all the wealth in Rome.' Listen to what happened to her next.

This mother bereft of her children makes her way to the monastery weeping greatly, and when she entered the orchard she found the door wide open. She entered without fear, saying: 'Mary, thanks be to you that I am inside the wall. God give me good speed!' As she went on, she found all the doors wide open to greet her, and when she entered the church, she whispered: 'Lord God, I greatly entreat You

Hulpt mi weder im minen abite,
Dat ic over .XIIIJ. iaer
Liet ligghen op onser vrouwen outaer,
Snachs, doen ic danen stiet!'
Dit en es gheloghen niet,
Ic segt u sonder ghile:
Scone, covele ende wile
Vant si ter selver stede weder,
Daer sijt hadde gheleit neder.
Si treact an haestelike
Ende seide: 'God van hemelrike
Ende Maria, maghet fijn,
Ghebenedijt moetti sijn!
Ghi sijt alre doghet bloeme!
In uwen reine magedoeme
Droeghedi een kint sonder wee,
Dat here sal bliven emmermee;
Ghi sijt een uut vercoren werde,
U kint maecte hemel ende erde.
Deze ghewelt comt u van Gode
Ende staet alto*o*s tuwen ghebode.
Den here, die ons broeder
Moghedi ghebieden als moeder
Ende hi u heten lieve dochter.
Hier omme levic vele te sochter.
Wie aen u soect ghenade,
Hi vintse, al comt hi spade.
U hulpe die es al te gro*o*t;
Al hebbic vernoy ende no*o*t,
Hets bi u ghewandelt so*o*,
Dat ic nu mach wesen vro*o*.
Met rechte maghic u benediën!'
Die slotele vander sacristiën
Sach si hanghen, in ware dine,

to help me to regain my habit, which fourteen years ago I lying on our Lady's altar, on the night when I ran away from here!' What I tell you is no lie or deception: shoes, cowl and veil she found in the very same place as she had once laid them down. Quickly she put them on, and said: 'God of Heaven, and Mary, sweet Virgin, blessed may You be. Mary, flower of every virtue, in your pure virginity you bore a child with no pain, who shall be Lord for evermore; you are a treasure beyond price, for your Child created heaven and earth. This power comes to you from God, and is always ready at your command. That Lord who became our brother you can command as a mother, and He can call you His dear daughter. This is my consolation, for whoever asks compassion from you will find it, however late he comes. Your help is very great indeed, for whatever distress and need I was in, you have so transformed it that now I can rejoice and truly I may bless you.' Her sacristan's key she saw hanging, truly,

Vor Mariën, daer sise hinc.
Die slotele hinc si aen hare
Ende ghinc ten core, daersi clare
Lampten sach herren in allen hoeken.
Daer na ghinc si ten boeken
Ende leide elc op sine stde,
Alsi dicke te voren dede,
Ende si bat der maghet Mariën,
Dat sise van evele moeste vriën
Ende haer kinder, die si liet
Ter weduwen huus in zwaer verdriet.
Binnen dien was die nacht ghegaen,
Dat dorloy begonste te slaen,
Daermen middernacht bi kinde.
Si nam cloczeel biden inde
Ende luude metten so wel te tiden,
Dat sijt ho*o*rden in allen ziden.
Die boven opten dormter laghen,
Die quam[en] alle sonder traghen
Vanden dormter ghemene.
Sine wisten hier af gro*o*t no clene.
Si bleef inden clo*o*ster haren tijt,
Sonder lach ter ende verwijt:
Maria hadde ghedient vo*o*r hare,
Ghelijc oft sijt selve ware.
Dus was die sonderse bekeert,
Maria te love, die men eert,
Der maghet van hemelrike,
Die altoos ghetrouwelike
Haren vrient staet in staden,
Alsi in node sijn verladen.

Dese ioffrouwe, daer ic af las,
Es nonne alsi te voren was.

before Mary's image where she had hung it, and she went into the choir, where she saw bright lamps burning in every corner. Then she went for the books and laid each one in its place, as she often had done before, and she prayed the Virgin Mary that she might be made free of all evil, and her children also, whom she had left with a heavy heart at the widow's house. In the meantime, the night had advanced, so that the clock began to strike, to announce to men that it was midnight, and she grasped the end of the bell-rope and rang for office so well that they heard it everywhere, and those who were asleep upstairs in the dormitory all came down together without delay. No one, great or small, knew anything about this. So she was able to live her days in the monastery without scorn or reproof. Mary had served for her, just as if she were Beatrice herself; and in this way was this sinful woman converted, to the glory of Mary, to whom men pay honour, the Virgin of Heaven, who always faithfully comes to the aid of her friends when they are brought into distress.

So this young woman of whom I have been telling you became a nun again as she was before;

Nu en willic vergheren niet
Haer twee kindere, die si liet
Ter weduwen huus in groter no*o*t.
Si en hadden ghelt noch bro*o*t.
In can u niet vergronden,
Doen si haer moeder niet en vonden,
Wat groter rouwe datsi dreven.
Die weduwe ghincker sitten neven:
Si hadder op ontfermenisse.
Si seide: ‘ic wille toter abdisse
Gaen met desen .ij. kinden.
God sal hare int herte sinden,
Dat si hen goet sal doen.’
Si deden ane cleder ende scoen,
Si ghincker met in co vent;
Si seide: ‘vrouwe, nu bekent
Den no*o*t van desen tween wesen:
Die moeder heefse met vresen
Te nacht in mijn huus g[h]elaten
Ende es ghegaen hare straten,
Ic en weet, west noch o*o*st.
Dus sijn die kinder onghetro*o*st.
Ic hulpe hen gheerne, wistic hoe.’
De abdisse spracker toe:
‘Houtse wel, ic saelt u lonen,
Dat ghijs u niet en selt becronen,
Na dat si u sijn ghelaten.
Men gheve hen der caritaten
Elcs daghes, om Gode.
Sint hier daghelijcs enen bode,
Die hen drincken hale ende eten.
Gheberst hen yet, laet mi weten.’
Die weduwe was vro*o*,
Dat haer comen was also*o*.

nor will I forget to tell you what happened to her two children, whom she left behind her in great need in the widow's house, with neither money nor food. I cannot describe to you their sorrow when they could not find their mother. The widow went to sit beside them, and she was filled with pity for them, and she said: ‘I shall go to the abbess with these two children, and God will move her heart to be kind to them.’ She put on their clothes and shoes and went with them to the convent, and she said: ‘My lady, see now the destitution of these two poor creatures, terrified because their mother left them last night in my house. She has made off, I do not know whether to east or west, leaving the children desolate, and I should be glad to help them if I knew how.’ The abbess said to her: ‘Take good care of them and I shall reward you, so that you have no reason to regret that they have been left with you. Every day we shall give them our alms for the love of God. Send a messenger here daily to fetch food and drink for them, and if they need anything, let me know of it.’ The widow was glad that things had happened so,

Si nam die kinder met hare
Ende hadder toe goede ware.
Die moeder, diese hadde ghesoghet
Ende pine daerom ghedo*o*ghet,
Haer was wel te moede,
Doen sise wiste in goeder hoede,
Haer kinder, die si begaf
In groter no*o*t ende ghinc af.
Sine hadde vaer no hinder
Vo*o*rt meer om hare kinder.
Si leide vort een heylech leven;
Menech suchten ende beven
Hadsi nacht ende dach,
Want haer die rouwe int herte lach
Van haren quaden sonden,
Di si niet en dorste vermonden
Ghenen mensche, no ontdecken,
No*o* in dichten o*o*c vertrecken.

Hier na quam op enen dach
Een abt, diese te visenteerne plach
Eenwerven binnen den iare,
Om te vernemen oft daer ware
Enech lachterlike gherochte,
Daersi blame af hebben mochte[n].
Sdaghes als hire comen was,
Lach die sonderse ende las
Inden coor haer ghebet,
In groter twivelingen met.
Die duvel becorese metter scame,
Dat si haer sondelike blame
Vore den abt niet en soude bringhen.
Alsi lach inder bedinghen,
Sach si, hoe dat neven haer leet

and she took the children away with her, and took good care of them. The mother who had suckled them and suffered great sorrow on their account was glad when she learned that they were being well looked after, these children of hers whom she had left in great need and abandoned. She had no further fear or anxieties about her children, and she led a holy life, often sobbing and trembling, both night and day, when her heart was visited by contrition for her wicked sins, which she did not dare to tell or reveal to anyone, or to put down in writing.

Then, upon a certain day, there came an abbot, who was accustomed to visit the monostery once a year, to inquire whether there were any reprehensible rumours for which they might be to blame. On the day of his arrival, this sinful woman was kneeling in the choir and saying her prayers in great doubt. The devil was tempting her not to reveal her sinful guilt to the abbot for fear of shame. As she knelt and pondered, she saw

Een ionghelinc, met witten ghecleet
Hi droech in sinen arm al bloot
Een kint, dat dochte haer doot.
Die ionghelinc warp op ende neder
Enen appel ende vinken weder
Voor tkint, ende maccte spel.
Dit versach die nonne wel,
Daersi in haer ghebede lach.
Si seiden: ‘vrient, oft wesen mach,
Ende of ghi co men sijt van Gode,
Soo manie u bi sine ghebode,
Dat ghi mi segt ende niet en heelt,
Waerom ghi voor dat kint speelt
Metten sconen appel root,
Ende het leet in uwen arm doot?
U spel en helpt hem niet een haer.’
‘Seker, nonne, ghi segt waer:
En weet niet van minen spele
Weder luttel no vele,
Hets doot, en hoort no en siet.
Al des ghelike en weet God niet,
Dat ghi leest ende vast:
Dat en helpt u niet een bast;
Hets al verloren pine,
Dat ghi neemt discipline:
Ghi sijt in sonden soo versmoort,
Dat God u beden niet en hoort
Boven in sijn rike.
Ic rade u: haestelike
Gaet ten abt, uwen vader,
Ende verteelt hem algader
U sonden, al sonder lieghen.
Laet u den duvel niet bedrieghen.
Die abt sal u absolveren

a young man dressed in white advancing towards her, and on his arm he carried a naked child, which seemed to her to be dead. The young man threw an apple up in front of the child and caught it again to amuse it. The nun, kneeling at prayer, saw this clearly, and she said: ‘Friend, if it may be that you have come from God, I admonish you by your obedience to Him that you tell me without concealment why you are playing with that fine red apple in front of the child, when it is lying dead on your arm? There is nothing you can do for it by playing with it.’ ‘Certainly, nun, what you say is true. The child does not know anything about my play: it is dead, and can neither hear nor see. And in just the same way, God does not know about your prayers and fastings, and they do not help you in the least, and all your pains are wasted when you scourge yourself, for you are so overwhelmed by sin that God up in His realm does not hear your prayers. I counsel you to go quickly to the abbot, your spiritual father, and tell him the whole of your sins without any lies. Do not let the devil hoodwink you.

Vanden sonden, die u deren.
Eest, dat ghise niet wilt spreken,
God salse zwaerlike an u werken!'
Die ionghelinc ghinc ute haer oghen;
Hine wilde haer nemmeer vertoghen.
Dat hi seide, heeft si verstaen.
morghens ghinc si also*o* saen
Ten abt ende bat, dat hi ho*o*rde
Haer biechte van worde te worde.
Die abt was vroet van sinne.
Hi seide: 'dochter, lieve minne,
Des en willic laten niet,
Bepeinst u wel ende besiet
Volcomelijc van uwen sonden.'
Ende si ghinc ten selven stonden
Den heyleghen abt sitten neven
Ende ontdecten hem al haer leven,
Ende haer vite van beghinne:
Hoe si met ere dulre minne
Becort was soo uter maten,
Dat si moeste ligghen laten
Haer abijt met groten vare
Eens snachts op onser vrouwen outare,
Ende rumede den clo*o*ster met enen man,
Die twee kindere aen hare wan.
Al dat haer ye was ghesciet,
Dies ne liet si achter niet;
Wat si wiste in haer herte gront,
Maecte si den abt al cont.
Doen si ghebiecht hadde algader,
Sprac dabt, die heyleghe vader:
'Dochter, ic sal u absolveren
Vanden sonden, die u deren,
Die ghi ji nu hebt ghelijt.

If you do wish to speak now, God will take a heavy vengeance on you.' The young man vanished from her sight, nor did he ever appear to her again, but she understood what he had said, and first thing in the morning she went to the abbot and begged him to hear her out while she made her confession. The abbot was a prudent man; and he said: 'My dear daughter, let me hear you without delay. Reflect well and consider what have been all your sins.' And straightway she went to sit near the holy abbot, and she told him her whole life and story from the beginning: how the madness of love tempted her so excessively that one night, in great fear, she had abandoned her habit upon the altar of our Lady, and had fled from the monastery with a man, who had begotten two children upon her. She did not conceal anything which had ever happened to her, and she told the abbot everything which was in the depths of her heart. When she had made a full confession, this holy old man the abbot said: 'Daugter, I shall absolve you from the sins which have been afflicting you and which you have reavealed to me.

Ghelo*o*ft ende ghebenedijt
Moet die moeder Gods wesen;'
Hi leide haer op tho*o*ft met desen
Die hant ende gaf haar perdoen.
Hi seide: 'ic sal in een sermoen
U biechte openbare seggen
Ende die so*o* wiselike beleggen,
Dat ghi ende u kinder mede
Nemmermeer, te ghere stede,
Ghenen lachter en selt ghecrigen.
Het ware onrecht, soudement swigen,
Die scone miracle, die ons here
Dede do*o*r siere moeder ere.
Ic saelt orconden over al.
Ic hope, datter noch bi sal
Menech sondare bekeren
Ende onser liever vrouwen eren.

Hi deet verstaen den covende,
Eer hi thuus weder wende,
Hoe ere nonnen was ghesciet;
Maer sine wisten niet,
Wie sie was, het bleef verholen.
Die abt voer Gode volen.
Der nonnen kinder nam hi beide
Ende vorese in sijn gheleide.
Grau abijt dedi hen an
Ende si worden twee goede man.
Haer moeder hiet Beatrijs.
Lo*o*f God ende prijs
Ende Maria, die Gode soghede,
Ende dese scone miracle toghede!
Si halp haer uut alre no*o*t.
Nu bidden wi alle, aleine ende gro*o*t,

Praised and blessed be the Mother of God!' With these words he laid his hand upon her head and gave her absolution; and he said: 'I shall preach a sermon and reveal what you have told me in confession, but I shall disguise it so skilfully that neither you nor your children will ever suffer scorn. It would not be right to conceal in silence this fair miracle which our Lord has performed to the honour of His mother. I shall make it known everywhere, and I hope that it will serve to convert many sinners and to promote the honour of our blessed Lady.'

He made known to the convent before he returned home what had happened to one of their nuns, but none of them knew who she was, for that remained a secret. The abbot did as God commanded him, and took both the children of the nun into his protection. He clothed them both in the grey habit, and they became two good men. Their mother was called Beatrice. Praise and honour be to God, and to Mary, who suckled God and achieved this lovely miracle! She helped Beatrice in all her need, and now let us all, small and great,

Die dese miracle horen lesen,
Dat Maria moet wesen
Ons vorsprake int soete dal,
Daer God die werelt doemen sal.

Amen.

who listen to this miracle, pray that Mary be our intercessor in that fertile valley where God shall judge the world. Amen

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